

Braley Questioning DeCoster and Bethel at Congressional Hearing

Washington, DC – Congressman Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) delivered the following statement today at a Congressional hearing investigating two Iowa companies believed responsible for a Salmonella outbreak that made 1600 Americans sick. Braley, the only Iowan on the Energy and Commerce committee, serves as vice chairman for the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

A live webstream of the hearing is available at <http://energycommerce.house.gov> .

Statement of Congressman Bruce Braley

Energy and Commerce Committee

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

“The Outbreak of Salmonella in Eggs”

September 22, 2010

Some of my earliest memories are walking into my grandparents' henhouses in Iowa to gather eggs. There was something almost spiritual about this daily routine act. The contented clucking of the hens...the suspense of looking for...and finding...those perfectly-shaped eggs, whose very name symbolizes birth and rejuvenation.

Growing up in Iowa you couldn't avoid commercials promoting "The Incredible Edible Egg." Eggs were a staple in our diet. We ate them fried, poached, hard-boiled, soft-boiled, over-easy, over hard, sunny side up, scrambled, in omelets ... And that was just for breakfast. We truly believed that eggs were "Nature's Most Nearly Perfect Food."

Growing up in Iowa, I don't remember my buying eggs at the store. We drove out to the country and bought them right off the farm from the mothers and grandmothers of the kids we went to school with. We dyed them at Easter and threw them on Halloween and we NEVER EVER imagined they could cause life-threatening illness or KILL us. That's why the recent revelations of an incomprehensible HALF BILLION egg recall originating in my home state was so disturbing.

So why are we here?

First and foremost, we need to examine how and why this happened - to ensure the safety of American families and prevent this type of tragedy from happening in the future.

Second, we need to identify and eliminate weaknesses in our state/federal food safety enforcement system, and take strong measures to hold wrongdoers accountable and protect the good reputations of producers who consistently play by the rules and supply safe food that is high in quality at a reasonable price.

The economic impact of egg producers in Iowa is indisputable. Iowa is America's number one egg producer by a country mile. Yet economic impact is no trump card when lives are at stake.

Like many Americans, I'm very disturbed by the increasing number of food-borne illnesses in the United States. These incidents... including the salmonella outbreak we're examining

today... all raise important questions about the safety and security of our nation's food supply. Unfortunately, these outbreaks also raise doubts about the adequacy of our current efforts to trace unsafe products, and to remove them quickly from the nation's food supply.

As an Iowan, I'm offended that some in the egg industry are suggesting that consumers are somehow responsible for getting sick because they didn't properly cook their eggs. Now is the time for accountability...not blame-shifting.

And as an Iowan, I was disgusted to read reports about federal investigators finding live mice, infestations of flies, mountains of manure, and other unsanitary conditions in the Iowa henhouses linked to the largest salmonella outbreak of its kind in the United States.

Equally disturbing was the report that the FDA has never inspected either of the Iowa egg facilities in question today, even though they are among the largest egg-laying facilities in the country.

In the past couple of years, we have heard about E. coli outbreaks related to spinach and lettuce, a Salmonella outbreak related to peanut products, and now a Salmonella outbreak related to eggs. Yet during that same time we have done nothing to change FDA authority as it relates to food safety.

It's clear that changes need to be made to our food system to provide assurances to parents that the food they feed to their families is safe.

The House passed food safety legislation late last year that would give the FDA authority to order mandatory food recalls, impose fines for food safety violations, and require more frequent food facility inspections. It would also give the FDA access to company records in the case of emergency. These are important first steps to make sure our food supply is safe.

There are a lot of questions to be answered today about the practices of Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms, as well as why the FDA never inspected either of these businesses. One thing that's clear is that we need to be doing a much better job of protecting America's families

from unsafe food products.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses, and hope that this hearing will help us determine what Congress can do to prevent this type of outbreak in the future and ensure the safety of our food supply.

Every four years people come to Iowa for the Presidential Caucuses and see our magnificent gold-domed Capitol. Yet few people take the time to go inside the Capitol and look up in the rotunda where our ancestors inscribed the wisdom of the ages.

My favorite is from the Greek Solon, who said: "The Ideal State-that in which an Injury done to the Least of its Citizens...is an Injury done to All."

Until we get serious about uniform federal food safety practices in this country, we are far from becoming that Ideal State. And until consumers feel as safe and secure buying eggs in in their neighborhood supermarket as I felt in my grandparents' henhouse, egg producers in Iowa and across this country have their work cut out for them.